

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Cultural and Emotional Safety Framework



About Us

'Healing the Past by Nurturing the Future' (HPNF) is an Aboriginal-led project which aims to co-design perinatal (from pregnancy to child age two) awareness, recognition, assessment and support strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) parents who have experienced complex childhood trauma.

The project commenced in 2018 and current funding runs until 2021. We are grateful for funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Lowitja Institute CRC.

Why is this research important?

Complex trauma can be caused following repeated hurtful or upsetting experiences (e.g. childhood maltreatment). Trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) people stems from colonial policies, such as stolen generations and land being taken away.

Complex trauma can cause long-lasting physical, social and emotional health problems. Trauma can pass from one generation to the next, known as **intergenerational trauma**. Parents may experience distressing trauma responses during pregnancy, birth and early parenting. This can make it harder for parents to care for or bond with their children.

However, parenting can also provide a unique **opportunity for healing** and nurturing relationships.

What is a safety framework?

This safety framework is designed to foster **emotional*** and **cultural* safety** for parents, service providers, project staff, investigators, stakeholders, and the Aboriginal community. Safety is essential particularly when we are talking or thinking about trauma.

The values that guide the project draw on Aboriginal meanings of **social and emotional wellbeing** and include safety, trustworthiness, empowerment, collaboration, culture, holistic, compassion and reciprocity.



How did we create a Safety Framework?

We co-designed the Safety Framework using existing **HPNF protocols***, drawing on **processes, frameworks and methods** used by **Aboriginal-led** research teams to conduct quality research that fosters cultural and emotional safety.

We also held a **workshop** in Adelaide with 40 (mainly Aboriginal) participants. Discussions at the workshop generated these themes:

- **Connectivity and communication;**
- **Cultural, emotional and psychological support;**
- **Valuing**, learning from and **collaborating** with community;
- **Commitment** to achieve outcomes.

What does it look like?

The Safety Framework (**below**) includes the **8 core project values**, the **4 main groups** the project works with, and the **key safety elements** that apply across groups to ensure cultural and emotional safety.



HPNF Safety Framework
Specific and central safety elements for the HPNF project

How does the safety framework guide our research?

1. **Understanding and awareness of the context of complex trauma** for Aboriginal people. For example, **training** to learn about **oppression***, racism and **lateral violence (LV)***, and how these contribute to trauma.
2. **Trauma-informed care** through:
 - Safety advice from Aboriginal Elders and families;
 - Facilitator training to minimise harm and provide **immediate responses to trauma**, through noticing the trauma, referral or support, and follow-up;
 - **Therapeutic care** provided by psychologists, counselors, or traditional healers, and/or **referral** to local services;
 - Other support practices for researchers and service providers through their organisation; such as **vicarious trauma** prevention and support or having supervision;
 - **Self-care** information.



Photo of two people sitting outside under a tree by Harli Martin on Unsplash

3. **Appropriate, inclusive**, and regular **communication** that is reviewed by Aboriginal team members to promote safety, including via email, newsletters, website, publications and face-to-face visits and workshops;
4. **Reciprocity**, which means a two-way sharing of knowledge, with a range of different views being offered and **valued**;
5. **Flexibility and governance**, with both Western and Aboriginal cultural practices leading the project, sharing of knowledge, co-design and joint decision-making;
6. **Connectivity and relatedness** to one another, culture and country. Working together protects against LV and racism.
7. Culturally **safe spaces** for groups and workshops, including separate spaces to rest, feed, or access support, as well as **Aboriginal cultural spaces**.



Photo of a mother holding her toddler on the beach by Jonathan Gallegos on Unsplash

*What do these terms mean?

“**Cultural safety**” means creating safe environments for Aboriginal people that nurture their **identity, strengths and culture**. We can help people feel culturally safe by reducing power differences; treating people equally; building relationships; and promoting cultural awareness and competency (especially for non-Aboriginal people).

“**Emotional safety**” is about **managing and responding** to emotions. This is key when talking and thinking about trauma. Strategies to build emotional safety include trauma awareness and responsiveness; cultural competency; and supporting social and emotional wellbeing.

“**Oppression**” is when people are treated harshly or unfairly, and are stopped from having the same freedom, opportunities and rights as others.

“**Lateral violence (LV)**” occurs when **oppressed** people take out their hurt or anger on each other, themselves, or others who have less power. It affects Aboriginal communities, who have been oppressed through policies, laws and practices. LV can be direct (e.g. violence) or indirect (e.g. gossiping).



Photo of hands reaching together by Perry Grone on Unsplash

Suggested citation

Whetham, H., Clark, Y., Bennetts, S., Gee, G., Ralph, N., Atkinson, C., Chamberlain C and the Healing the Past by Nurturing the Future team (2019). Research Summary 4: Cultural and Emotional Safety Framework.

For more information

Clark, Y., Gee, G., Ralph, N., Atkinson, C., Brown, S., Glover, K., McLachlan, H., Gartland, D., Hirvonen, T., Atkinson, J., Andrews, S., Chamberlain, C., the Healing the Past by Nurturing the Future Investigators Group1 and Co-Design Group2. (in press). Healing the past by nurturing the future: Cultural and emotional safety framework. *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing: Te Mauri-Pimatisiwin*.

Link to full article: <https://journalindigenousewellbeing.com/media/2020/05/135.148.The-Healing-the-Past-by-Nurturing-the-Future-Cultural-and-emotional-safety-framework.pdf>

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[Watch our YouTube Video “Healing the Past By Nurturing the Future”](#)

HPNF protocol*: Chamberlain, C., Gee, G., Brown, S. J., Atkinson, J., Herrman, H., Gartland, D., ... Nicholson, J. (2019). Healing the Past by Nurturing the Future—co-designing perinatal strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents experiencing complex trauma: framework and protocol for a community-based participatory action research study. *BMJ Open*, 9(6).